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Fear the city

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Fearscapes

Urban fear has been a central theme in anthropology, psychology, geography, sociology and urban politics (Abu-Orf, 2013, p. 158). Fear (economic, political, social, religious, and cultural) and violence (criminal, ethno-religious or political) shape experiences of urban space, and result in physical changes to the built environment. In conceptualizing the fear in planning theory, Abu-Orf addresses what fear does to repress the 'defenseless' ethnic groups and how this fear shapes 'lived space' from three geographical perspectives of the individual, feminist geography and globalized fear (Abu-Orf, 2013, pp. 159-160).

Despite the scholarly attention to the definition of urban fear, its conceptualisation in urban politics is far from clear-cut due to 'fundamental differences over methodologies, politics and explanations' (Shirlow & Pain, 2003, p. 17). Perceived safety of spaces (such as 'good' or 'bad' neighborhood, 'threatening' and 'threatened' urban spaces) can be contingent upon residents' mental map of fear and anxiety. Geographies of fear are often related to discourses surrounding those who are seen as 'others' in social contexts (England & Simon, 2010, p. 201). Physical security infrastructure such as walls, checkpoints and other barriers also work to impede some types of movements and facilitate others (Jaffe & De Koning, 2016, pp. 154-155).

Fear of 'others' can lead to exclusion from public space of those who are seen as threatening (Hebert & Brown, 2006; Nawratek & Mehan, 2020). Desire in planning practice in violent settings is apparent in a 'mobility regime' designed to exclude fearful 'others', using 'avoidance' (Abu-Orf, 2013, p. 173). This process of 'otherness' renders fear as an arena of conflict, and highlights the political utility of fear by particular groups and individuals (Pain, 2001). Focusing on Western context, Simone Tulumello suggested the concept of "fearscapes"- through the process of spatialization of urban fear- in order to describe the growing landscapes of fear (Tulumello, 2015). Geographies of urban fear have been utilized to prevent certain kinds of urbanity from materializing (England & Simon, 2010, p. 204). These fear-based material and institutional settings produce a new physical arrangement and social ordering of the city.

The recent examples of protest squares and insurgent urbanism around the world highlighted the formation of 'a social movement space' through public protests which has triggered the various state-led strategies to control the urban insurgencies (Mehan & Rossi, 2019). Ipek Tureli argues that although protest movements appropriate public space temporally they transform its image, and use, permanently (Tureli, 2013, p. 15). In the Middle East, protests – when they have happened – have been more spontaneous, conflictual and influential in threatening the power structures and the political

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establishment. Moreover, the historical importance of radical spatialities for mobilization and protest as well as the collective political memory of past revolutions, were special factor for protesters, and images and meanings of protest squares were (re)appropriated by protestors during the social movement (Mehan, 2020, p. 69). Most likely due to the fear of wider national uprisings, the authorities in these countries are seeking to institutionalise urban movements by limiting or (de)politicising their spatiality. By shifting the spatiality of resistance to a demarcated and controlled space, the State in these countries focused on changing the sociability and urbanity of specific localities of protests. In response to emerging radical spatialities, various local authorities in the Middle East have pushed for a privatisation of public space, while still acting within the limits of local urban regulations (Zamani & Mehan, 2019).

Tehran as (Anti) Structure

State-led strategies aimed at producing urban security through different forms of social control affects urban spaces and residents in different ways. From this perspective, spaces of fear are understood as being the result of hegemonic production and the product of uneven power relations.

Due to the fear of wider national uprisings, the authorities in these countries are seeking to institutionalise urban movements by limiting or (de)politicising their spatiality.

Drawing on Foucault's rationality of governance, the new urban social order – called as "spatial governmentality" – is governed through spatial mechanism of control (such as exclusion of risky populations,

spatial zoning, ordering and regulations) along with neoliberal ideas of the diminished state (for example encouraging the privatization of formerly public spaces) (Merry, 2001). These state-led spatial strategies are practiced around the world, yet through different mechanisms. In response to civil protests and social unrests, the State imposes increasing temporal, spatial and legal limits on the public practice of politics. Examples of this are the "negotiated management style of protest policing" or the "strict micro-management of demonstrations" (Zamani & Mehan, 2019, p. 483; Vitale, 2005, p. 286-287). Here, protests are normally induced, institutionalised and controlled, to the point that they turn into ineffective and powerless carnivals of dissent. There is a normalization of civil protests that limits their socio-political influence (Gillham, Edwards, & Noakes, 2013).

In the Middle East, protests have been more antagonistic to the State's power and institutions. Accordingly, they have been more spontaneous, conflictual and influential in threatening the power structures and the political establishment – despite the very high cost that they inflicted on civil society and public services. Specifically, this study focuses on Iran, in which recent policies and strategies have been proposed and implemented to reduce and possibly neutralize the impacts

of urban and political protests. More importantly, these spatialities are transforming the memory of public space, as the paper analyzing whether these memories have been accentuated by the radical spatiality of dissent or diminished by the spatiality of control and State domination (Zamani & Mehan, 2019, p. 484).

Tehran expanded its "radical spatiality" through recent movements, social unrests, and revolutions (especially the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Green Movement of 2009). The recent movements also highlighted the socio-political importance of Revolution (in Farsi Enqelab) Street and Freedom (in Farsi Azadi) Square as spaces of protests in modern Tehran. The urban centres of uprisings in Tehran, hold a spatial significance as sites of protest and urban mobilization that evoke collective political memory of past revolutions. In analysing how political memory works with and relates to space, it can be argued that the historical importance of Azadi as a square for mobilization and protest prior to the 2009 Green Movement demonstrations was a special factor of attraction for protesters, and

images and meanings of the square were appropriated by protesters during the social movement (Mehan, 2020, p. 69–70).

Starting from December 2017 and continuing into 2018, a series of public protests occurred in various cities throughout Iran, specifically addressing the daily life of women in public spaces. The recent women's movement in Tehran highlighted the socio-political importance of Revolution (in Persian: Enghelab) Street and Freedom (in Persian: Azadi) Square in building and representing spaces of protests in modern Tehran (Mehan and Rossi, 2019, p. 239). After the January 2018 protests, one of the key responses of the State within the context of Tehran has been the de-politicization of public spaces. The local authorities and national government have attempted in multiple ways to limit political protests. In 2018, Tehran's City Council passed a bill to demarcate certain places for protests and political expression. The Iranian Parliament followed suit, delineating a few specific public spaces in Tehran for the specific purpose of political protests, while banning any form of political mobilization in other urban spaces. On June 10, 2018, the Minister's Committee announced 12 locations where authorised protests could be held in the capital. The city council members proposed the specific "appropriate" locations of public protests (inspired by western democratic societies) as legal locations (or protest zones) for people to be seen and heard by other inhabitants, and to identify appropriate places that have the capacity for police protection, security, the emergency services and preventing traffic jams.¹ Following Mitchell and Staeheli (2005), in the case of Tehran, "dissent has become resistance", meaning the emerging forms of control and domination by the State over the public spaces have failed (Mitchell & Staeheli, 2005). Not only are the movements resistant to an ideological cleansing of the physical space, or a normalizing of protest as a tool to sustain the oppression, but they are resistant to the erasure of memories and deep-rooted urban identities of radical spatialities (Zamani & Mehan, 2019, p. 494).

Concluding Notes

In response to the state-led fearscape, social movements and radical spatialities aim to pursue a common political agenda of change through collective action and solidarity. Revolutions and political movements have liminal stages in which the structure of everyday life of the immediate past has been overturned, but new structures have not yet emerged to replace them, a situation — Turner termed as *AntiStructure* in which most of the characteristics that defined the normal configuration of sociopolitical life ceased to function (Turner & Turner, 1978). Followingly, the word *Communitas* describes as an intense feeling of community, solidarity, and togetherness experienced by those who live together in an *AntiStructure* in which the normal social statuses and positions have broken down (Turner, 1969). This situation is not out of place for describing the dominant atmosphere of insurgent spatialities during revolutions and social unrests.

Within today's 'reactionary cycle' characterized by national revanchism across the world, an unconditional pursuit of resistance is critical to the recovery of democracy and even to its expansion, which occurs when small-scale or individual resistance unexpectedly gives rise to larger uprisings, as we have seen (Mehan & Rossi, 2019, p. 244). In this sense, the idea of the city as the (Anti)structure shows that the urban has the vital capacity to multiply the effects of resistance on politics, people and society in order to become an active force of socio-political change.

¹ See Etemad Newspaper (published on 12 June 2018 in Farsi): www.etemadnewspaper.ir/1397/03/22/Main/PDF/13970322-4108-4-2.pdf

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